

The Drama of World History

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W. History

The Beginnings of Human Society

Why Study This Era:

- To understand how human species fully emerged out of biological evolution and cultural development is to understand in some measure what it means to be human.
- The common past that all students share begins with the peopling of our planet and the spread of settled societies around the world.
- The cultural forms, social institutions, and practical techniques that emerged in the Neolithic age laid the foundations for the emergence of all early civilizations.
- Study of human beginnings throws into relief fundamental problems of history that pertain to all eras: the possibilities and limitations of human control over their environment; why human groups accept, modify, or reject innovations; the variety of social and cultural paths that different societies may take; and the acceleration of social change through time.

Objectives: After studying this material, students should be able to:

1. Explain how archaeologists, historians, and geographers helped us learn about the lives of people at different stages in history.
2. Identify and explain the various technologies Stone Age people developed.
3. Describe religious beliefs and practices developed by early peoples.
4. Cite the basic features of civilization.

Outline:

- I. Origins of the Human Community: Learning to Cooperate (3500 BCE) – *Characteristics of humans*
 - A. Setting the Stage: Creation & Evolution – pp. 2-8
 - B. Gathering and Hunting: Humans Share the Resources – pp. 8-12
 - C. Settling Down: Revolutionary Changes brought by Agriculture pp. 10-17
 - D. Nomadic Herdsmen: An Alternative Lifestyle – outside reading
- II. Surplus, Specialization and Cities (3rd millennium BCE) – *Urban Life*
 - A. Setting the Stage: What is so special about river valleys? – pp. 13 - 17
 - B. Sumer: City-states in Mesopotamia pp. 31-45
 - C. Africa: The Nile River Valley Civilization pp. 22-31
 - D. India: The Harappan Civilization pp. 48-57/Virtual tour
 - E. China: Dynastic Rule pp. 58-63
 - F. Aegean: Minoan Hegemony
 - G. Summary: The Advantages of Cooperation, Trade & Interdependence – pp.

Assignments:

Early hominid development in Africa

1. *Based on examination of a week's worth of household garbage, what could you infer about your own way of life?* Compare your conclusions with inferences you could make about an early hunter-gatherer community based on remains associated with it. *About what aspects of life are inferences drawn from common refuse most, and least, informative?*
2. Using archaeological evidence, map the distribution and dates of Australopithecine, Homo erectus, Neanderthal, and the earliest Homo sapiens remains, along with the major features of flora, fauna, and climate associated with them. Based on this information, draw conclusions about the adaptability and success of hominids. *What new challenges did hominids have to meet as they moved from one climatic zone to another?*

How human communities populated the major regions of the world and adapted to a variety of environments

1. Hypothesize reasons why language developed as a way for humans to communicate. *How would language be useful to hunters who wished to trap and kill a mammoth? How might naming and classifying tools help in spreading technology from one community to another? How would language have helped communities make complex rules governing social relationships between men and women or adults and children?*

The processes that led to the emergence of agricultural societies around the world

1. Make a list of plants and animals domesticated during the "Neolithic Revolution," and construct a map showing where and when the domestication occurred.
2. Construct historical arguments to assess the interconnection between agricultural production and cultural change (such as division of labor, change in concept of time, gender roles).
3. Analyze scholarly evidence to explain the varied methods of crop cultivation. *How were methods of agriculture different in Southwest Asia as compared to West Africa and Southwest Asia?*